



SoTL: Analyzing Data

Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence

Analyzing the Evidence: What It Reveals about Student Learning

You've now gathered some evidence of student learning, ideally a variety. Now comes the analysis of this evidence. How does it help you answer your research question? Think carefully about the kinds of answers your research question seeks, such as

- **frequency** (how many students who did **x**, number of instances of **y** in the data or high grades or “strongly agree” responses, number of attempts at **z**, etc)
- **change in numbers** (increase in high grades, number of students retained, decrease in affirmative responses to a survey question, etc.)
- **description** (what moments of learning or the lack thereof look like, emerging patterns of behavior, responses in a survey)
- **interpretation** (what the student text means, often grouped in themes; analysis of quality)

You may also draw on a variety of resources for analyzing your data:

- First, consider your own expertise. What mode(s) of analysis are at the heart of your training? Remember, SoTL is conducted by disciplinary experts, so draw on your expertise when relevant.
- Next, even if you're working on an individual project, colleagues with complementary analytical expertise can be brought in for this stage of the project.¹
- Finally, there may be pre-existing tools available to support your work. While you may develop your own, there may already be ready-to-use and potentially more credible resources out there. Possibilities include validated measurement instruments (e.g., surveys, assessments), carefully designed and pretested rubrics (e.g., AAC&U VALUE Rubrics), previous scholars' identified patterns or coding schemes (e.g., published as the mode of analysis or a typology of findings in a previous study), among others. Use your lit review to identify any existing resources.

¹ Always make sure you formally acknowledge their contributions when you go public with your work in any way.

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